

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 (ISO) W
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R 290944Z SEP 76

FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2666

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 LENINGRAD 1586

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, PINT, SREF, CVIS, OGEN

SUBJ: CONFLICT AMONG LENINGRAD REFUSENIKS

REF: (A) LENINGRAD 1409, (B) LENINGRAD 1540, (C) LENINGRAD 1587,
(D) LENINGRAD 1588

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. RECENT REPORTS INDICATE THE RECENT VIOLENT STRUGGLE BETWEEN REFUSENIKS SHESTAKOVSTSIY AND SVERDLIN HAS SHOCKED AND DIVIDED THE ACTIVIST COMMUNITY. IT HAS GIVEN POLICE AN OPPORTUNITY, THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH CANNOT YET BE ASSESSED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DARKEST CLOUD ON THE LENINGRAD REFUSENIKS' HORIZON THIS SUMMER WAS THE RECENT ALTERCATION REPORTED REFTTEL A. TWO LATER VERSIONS OF THAT INCIDENT LARGELY CORROBORATE THE FIRST. THE SOURCES THEMSELVES POINT OUT THAT THE POLICE INVESTIGATION CONTINUES WITH NO CHARGES OR ARRESTS HAVING YET BEEN MADE, AND SOME ARE RELUCTANT EITHER TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER TOO CLOSELY THEMSELVES --ONE SOURCE SAID THAT IT IS BEST FOR THE TIME BEING TO KEEP ONE'S HEAD DOWN--OR TO DISCUSS IT WITH CONSOFF.

3. AS FAR AS WE CAN SEPARATE FACT FROM SPECULATION, HOWEVER, IT SEEMS THAT THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY INCIDENT INVOLVED SOME KIND OF MISUNDERSTANDING LEADING FIRST TO THREATS AND ULTIMATELY TO A PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION. IT FURTHER SEEMS THAT THE DISAGREEMENT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH A RIFT BETWEEN THOSE WHO THINK THE ONLY HOPE IS TO EMIGRATE AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE ON THE CONTRARY THAT ONE MUST
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LOOK TO THE REBUILDING AND STRENGTHENING OF JEWISH CULTURAL LIFE

FOR THOSE WHO REMAIN IN THE SOVIET UNION. SVERDLIN, ALTHOUGH HIMSELF A MAN WHO HAS TRIED TO EMIGRATE--IS IDENTIFIED WITH THE SECOND GROUP.

4. IN ANY EVENT, SVERDLIN AND A GROUP OF COMPANIONS DID INDEED THREATEN SHESTAKOVSKIY AND INDEED OBTAINED ENTRY TO HIS APARTMENT BY A RUSE. ONE OF OUR LATEST SOURCES ON THE AFFAIR CANNOT AFFIRM THAT SHESTAKOVSKIY WAS ACTUALLY ASSAULTED, AND ALLOWS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE QTE DEEP CUT WOUNDS ENDQTE SUFFERED BY HIM MAY HAVE BEEN ACCIDENTAL, ALTHOUGH ANOTHER SOURCE WHO VISITED SHESTAKOVSKIY'S APARTMENT THE EVENING AFTER THE QTE FIGHT UNQTE, REPORTS HAVING SEEN GREAT DISORDER, INDICATING A STRUGGLE, AND A GREAT DEAL OF BLOOD. FIRST SOURCE HERE CITED THINKS THAT SHESTAKOVSKIY'S OPPONENTS MAY HAVE INTENDED ONLY TO FRIGHTEN HIM BUT THAT THEY ACTED IN A CLUMSY AND COWARDLY MANNER THAT ENDANGERED SHESTAKOVSKIY'S LIFE. SOURCE DOES NOT CONSIDER SVERDLIN CAPABLE OF MURDER EVEN THOUGH HE DOES NOT LIKE HIM. (SVERDLIN SEEMS TO HAVE AN UNSAVORY REPUTATION AS A RESULT OF AN ALLEGED SCANDALOUS PURSUIT OF AN UNDERAGED GIRL AND BECAUSE OF AN ALLEGED TENDENCY TOWARD SELF-ADVERTISEMENT.)

5. A WINDOW WAS BROKEN IN THE STRUGGLE, AND SHESTAKOVSKIY SUSTAINED DEEP CUTS ON HIS ARMS, CHEST, NECK, AND BACK. ONE SOURCE REPORTS SHESTAKOVSKIY HIMSELF BROKE OUT THE WINDOW TO CRY FOR HELP. IN ANY EVENT, THE INTRUDERS FLED, LEAVING A BRIEFCASE BEHIND. SHESTAKOVSKIY WAS UNABLE TO SUMMON HELP BECAUSE OF SOME UNSPECIFIED DAMAGE WHICH HAD BEEN DONE TO HIS TELEPHONE INSIDE THE APARTMENT. HE MADE HIS WAY ONTO THE LANDING AND WAS ASSISTED BY NEIGHBORS WHO SUMMONED AN AMBULANCE. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, SHESTAKOVSKIY NEARLY DIED OF BLEEDING AND WAS SAVED BY MEDICAL PROCEDURES CARRIED OUT ON THE SPOT IN THE SPECIALLY EQUIPPED

AMBULANCE WHICH WAS DISPATCHED TO THE SCENE.

6. AN IMPORTANT BUT UNCLEAR ELEMENT IN THE INCIDENT IS THE ROLE OF THE POLICE, WHO ARE VARIOUSLY THOUGHT TO BE UNINVOLVED, BEMUSED, GRATEFUL, AND BEHIND IT ALL. SHESTAKOVSKIY HAD EARLIER SOUGHT THEIR ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH THE THREATS MADE AGAINST HIM AND HAD BEEN WARNED BY THEM NOT TO ADMIT ANYONE INTO HIS APARTMENT. HE HAD EVEN BEEN OFFERED A POLICE ESCORT IN THE EVENT THAT HE MIGHT BE CHALLENGED A SECOND TIME TO COME TO MEET

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HIS ANTAGONISTS.

7. POLICE DID, HOWEVER, AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE OPPORTUNITIES THE INCIDENT AFFORDED. THEY CONDUCTED A SEARCH AND SEIZED ALL SHESTAKOVSKIY'S PAPERS. THEY REPORTEDLY REPAIRED THE TELEPHONE, AND A DUTY OFFICER SAT AND ACCEPTED ALL CALLS THE REST OF THE DAY, TELLING CALLERS HE WAS SHESTAKOVSKIY'S BROTHER GRISHA. WHEN THE REAL GRISHA APPEARED, HE WAS DETAINED AND INTERROGATED.

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FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2667
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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8. THERE ARE SEVERAL CURIOUS DETAILS CONCERNING THE INCIDENT, HOWEVER. ONE IS THAT WHILE SHESTAKOVSKIY REPORTED FIVE INTRUDERS INSIDE THE APARTMENT, NEIGHBORS REPORTED SEEING SIX MEN FLEE. PERHAPS A LOOKOUT HAD BEEN POSTED IN CASE OF POLICE INTERVENTION, SOURCE SAYS. SECONDLY, ONE OF THE INTRUDERS, AS YET UNKNOWN TO SOURCES, WAS ARMED WITH A PISTOL. THEY ALSO REPORTEDLY BROUGHT ALONG A TAPE RECORDER (AND TURNED IT ON) AND PAPER WITH THE APPARENT INTENTION OF OBTAINING SOME SORT OF STATEMENT FROM SHESTAKOVSKIY.

9. ONE OF THE LATEST SOURCES TENDS TO DISCOUNT THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE POLICE WILL USE THE INCIDENT TO BLACKEN THE ACTIVISTS' REPUTATION OR TO CUT OFF EMIGRATION AND EVEN ALLOWED THEY MIGHT DROP THE MATTER SINCE NO INDICTMENT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED YET. SOURCES CONFIRM THAT NEITHER SVERDLIN NOR ANYONE ELSE HAS BEEN ARRESTED ALTHOUGH THE PRINCIPALS HAVE BEEN INTERROGATED. AT MOST, ONE SOURCE HOPES, MATTER WILL BE TREATED AS AN ORDINARY QTE PRIVATE UNQUOTE CRIMINAL CASE--I.E., NOT AS A CRIME AGAINST SOCIETY-- AND WILL RESULT IN A CORRESPONDINGLY LIGHT PENALTY.

10. IN SUPPORT OF THIS VIEW, THIS SOURCE CITES A RECENT CASE IN MOSCOW IN WHICH A MAN WAS ACCIDENTALLY KILLED IN A SHOVING INCIDENT AT A TAXI STAND BUT WHICH INVOLVED DISSIDENTS AND REFUSENIKS. IN THAT AFFAIR, THE SECRETARY EITHER TO SAKHAROV OR LEVICH--OUR SOURCE WAS NOT CERTAIN WHICH-- WAS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED. DESPITE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE TROUBLE. THE AUTHORITIES CONTENTED THEMSELVES WITH A FINDING OF QTE NEGLIGENT DEATH END QTE. THE DEAD MAN HAD, AFTER ALL, BEEN DRUNK. SOURCE EXPRESSED FEAR, NEVERTHELESS, THAT THE INCIDENT COULD BE USED BY

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POLICE NOT TO PERMIT ANY MORE EXIT VISAS TO BE ISSUED TO REFUSENIKS.

11. SOURCES NOW BELIEVE THE CRISIS MAY HAVE PASSED IN THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY INCIDENT AND THAT POLICE HAVE DECIDED NOT TO MAKE A BIG ISSUE OF IT. ONE SOURCE BASES THIS BELIEF ON THE PERMISSION TO EMIGRATE JUST ANNOUNCED TO LEONID RAINUS AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF NO PERMISSIONS GRANTED. RAINUS, A CLOSE FRIEND OF SOURCE, WAS REPORTEDLY AN ACTIVIST, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS PERMISSION REVEAL, AS DID THE RECENT CASE OF PERMISSION TO EMIGRATE GRANTED TO UNOFFICIAL ARTIST IGOR SINYAVIN, A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF AN EARLIER REFUSAL. TWO OR THREE WEEKS AGO, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, RAINUS AND HIS FAMILY, INCLUDING HIS AGED AND INFIRM MOTHER, WERE SUMMONED TO OVIR ON A MONDAY. THIS WAS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY MATTER. THE RAINUSES HAD HOPED THE SUMMONS MEANT A REVERSAL OF THEIR LAST REFUSAL, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY HAD BEEN TOLD EARLIER THERE WAS SOME QTE DEVELOPMENT END QTE IN THEIR CASE. THEIR REFUSAL WAS, HOWEVER, RECONFIRMED AT THAT MEETING.

12. SOURCE SPECULATES THAT SINCE THAT INCIDENT CAME AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY INVESTIGATION, THE AUTHORITIES DECIDED TO WITHHOLD A PERMISSION ACTUALLY ALREADY DECIDED UPON UNTIL THEY COULD MAKE UP THEIR MINDS HOW TO PLAY THAT AFFAIR--WHETHER TO MAKE A BIG TO-DO ABOUT IT OR TO HANDLE IT QUIETLY AS THE IMPERATIVES OF THEIR TENEBROUS LOGIC MIGHT DICTATE. THAT THEY DECIDED TO "RELEASE" THE RAINUS DECISION GREATLY ENCOURAGES SOURCE THAT THERE WILL BE NO CRACKDOWN AND THAT THE PRESENT HOPEFUL TREND WILL CONTINUE.

13. OVIR'S DECISION TO PERMIT YAKOV EPSHTEIN AND HIS FAMILY TO EMIGRATE, ANNOUNCED ON SEPTEMBER 24, IS TAKEN BY SOURCES TO SUPPORT THIS INTERPRETATION. BOTH RAINUS AND EPSHTEIN ARE SAID TO BE QTE PARTISANS OF SHESTAKOVSKIY END QTE. COMMENT. THIS INTERPRETATION OF THESE EXIT PERMISSION CASES IS CONSISTENT WITH THE EARLIER VERSION OF THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY AFFAIRS, REPORTED REFTTEL A, IN THAT THERE ALSO THE INVESTIGATION WAS DEPICTED AS AN EFFORT BY THE AUTHORITIES TO MAKE UP THEIR MINDS HOW TO APPROACH THE MATTER. END COMMENT.

14. HOWEVER THAT MIGHT BE, THE MATTER IS NOT OVER AS FAR AS
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SHESTAKOVSKIY IS CONCERNED. HE HAS ENTERED SUIT IN ZDHANOVSKIY

REGIONAL COURT REQUESTING THE JUDGE TO RULE THAT THE ATTACK BE
CONSIDERED ATTEMPTED MURDER. LATEST SOURCE EVEN SUGGESTS POLICE
EXPECT, AND MIGHT EVEN WELCOME, A FEUD--WITH SHESTAKOVSKIY AND HIS
BROTHER SEEKING REVENGE AGAINST SVERDLIN AND HIS ASSOCIATES.
IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE A REPORT THAT BOTH RAINUS AND EPSHTEIN
WERE ASKED WHETHER THEY WOULD TESTIFY IN SHESTAKOVSKIY'S SUIT.
UPON SAYING NO, THEY WERE GRANTED PERMISSION TO EMIGRATE,
OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT NEEDED.

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ACTION SS-25

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15. COMMENT: WHATEVER THE VALIDITY OF SOURCES' BELIEF THAT
THE AFFAIR MIGHT BE OVER FROM THE POLICE'S POINT OF VIEW, THE
INCIDENT, IF IT DOES, AS OUR SOURCES SUGGEST, REFLECT SOME
SERIOUS FRICTION AMONG THE ACTIVISTS, BODES ILL FOR THE SOVIET
JEWISH CAUSE. IT IS SAID TO HAVE DIVIDED THE ACTIVISTS; AND
THE PARTISANS OF THE CULTURAL MOVEMENT IN PARTICULAR ARE REPORTED
BUSILY WRITING LETTERS TO THEIR ASSOCIATES ABROAD JUSTIFYING THEIR
POSITION IN THE AFFAIR. EVEN THE MOSCOW ACTIVIST COMMUNITY IS
REPORTED TO HAVE BECOME INVOLVED IN THE AFFAIR. THESE DIFFERENCES
MAY WELL BE AIRED BY THE ACTIVISTS THEMSELVES, AS ONE SOURCE
HINTED, AT THE UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SOVIET JEWRY
TO BE HELD IN MOSCOW IN DECEMBER (REFTEL B) SHOULD THAT EVENT
ITSELF BE PERMITTED. ON THIS VIEW, THE AUTHORITIES MIGHT WELL
HAVE CONCLUDED TO DROP THE SVERDLIN-SHESTAKOVSKIY AFFAIR TO GIVE
THE ACTIVISTS ENOUGH ROPE TO HANG THEMSELVES.
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